

Model Letter Complaining About Video Exposure in Schools

[Dear Parents: Because many of you have expressed frustration about the showing of inappropriate videos in schools, daycare centers, and afterschool programs, I propose here a model letter that you can adapt to your needs if the problem arises. In creating this model, I have been aided by the suggestions of other parents who have confronted the same issue. Feel free to use and modify this for your needs. Let me know what kind of response you get and whether you have further suggestions. Good Luck!]

To: [Name] Supervisor of School or After-school Program
Dear Ms/Mr [Name]:

I want to discuss a problem that has occurred [has been occurring] at your school. I am referring to the showing of violent videos that are inappropriate and harmful to children. [Here, you may want to name the specific movie or movies in question, any specifics about it that concern you, and any reaction you observed in your child, if appropriate.]

Videos such as these are inappropriate because of what we know about the effects of media violence on children. There is an irrefutable, scientifically proven relationship between the viewing of violence by children and psychological harm. The American Academy of Pediatrics and other major public health organizations have recommended that children's viewing of violent programming be restricted. There is a great deal of evidence that the viewing of media violence leads to imitation, to attitudes more accepting of violence, to increased hostility, and to intense fears, anxieties and nightmares. For an up-to-date review of this literature, see "The Psychological Effects of Media Violence on Children and Adolescents," which is available at www.yourmindonmedia.com/downloads/media_violence_paper.pdf [or, the paper could be printed out and attached.]

Research also shows that young children are especially vulnerable to the effects of media violence because they do not yet fully grasp the distinction between make-believe and reality. Furthermore, movie ratings are often not helpful as a guide to what is appropriate for young children because G-rated animated features are some of the most violent movies available and confront some of the most disturbing themes for young children, such as abandonment and parental death. The movie ratings are determined by a panel of parents who have no expertise in child development; moreover, the process of rating movies is secret and controlled by the movie industry.

I urge you to consider the powerful role that you play in the lives of the children in your care. I hope that you will eliminate the use of movies and TV programming as a planned or alternate activity in your program. Or, if you do show movies on an occasional basis, I strongly urge you to screen them in advance and reject all but nonviolent, educational videos.

Please feel free to call me to discuss this further.

With best regards,